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REMARKS BY U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH DAN MOZENA

Closing Ceremony

South Asia Women Parliamentarians Conference: Women Leading for Gender-Responsive Governance

Dhaka

July 11, 2012

Chief Guest, Hon Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, State Minister for Women and
Children's Affairs

Co-Chief Guest, Joyнал Abdin Farrouqe, Chief Whip of the Opposition Bangladesh
Nationalist Party

Ruby Rahman, Bangladesh MP and nationally recognized poet

Justice Fakhar-un-Nisa Khokhar, Pakistan

Simeen Mahmood, Center for Gender and Social Transformation, BRAC University

Hasan Mazumdar, Country Representative, The Asia Foundation

Conference Coordination Team

After my remarks at the inaugural dinner a few nights back, several people asked me how
a boy from a farm ended up as American ambassador to Bangladesh.

As you might expect, the answer to that question again reflects the power of women.

In this case it was Miss Albrecht, the teacher of the one-room country school that I
attended for primary school. The school was literally a single room; it had a total of 12 students
spread over 9 grades from kindergarten through grade 8. I remember as a third and fourth grader
sitting at my desk, listening to Miss Albrecht's eighth grade geography class as she described the
wonders of the world. Miss Albrecht, who had never traveled beyond my home district, had a
vivid imagination, and I remember best her describing the Silk Route. As she painted a picture
of traders coursing their way through the treacherous mountains of central and south Asia, I

ignored my own work and imagined myself someday following in the footsteps of those ancient traders of the Silk Route.

Miss Albrecht planted a seed, a seed of curiosity, of determination, and that seed germinated and took root and through a series of adventures and misadventures, I ended up in the Foreign Service. Once during my posting to Pakistan, I took a group of Boy Scouts on a rafting trip on the Hunza River, which courses through the mountains of northern Pakistan. We knew that the ancient Silk Route paralleled the river, and at one point the Silk Route dipped to only a thousand feet or so above the river. We used our climbing gear to try to work our way up to the path, but the wind was so strong that we called off the climb. As we retreated to our rafts, I just happened to look over my shoulder and noticed a wash only 30 meters or so away. I worked myself over to the wash and started scrambling over the loose rocks. Every time I came up to a rock face, I found a hole scoured out by the water and crawled on until eventually I found myself on the path of my dreams. I waved for the Scouts to scramble up and soon we all stood on the Silk Route. The Scouts lined up behind me and in silence and my many tears, we walked a stretch of the Silk Route. Indeed, the seed planted by Miss Albrecht had come to bear wondrous fruit.

As I stand before you, I look upon a sea of Miss Albrechts, as you, too, are teachers; you, too, can plant seeds of new ideas, new approaches, new concepts that could germinate into a new reality in your home country, a new reality in which women come to participate fully in your nation's development.

Just as my journey from the farm to the Silk Road was long and uncertain, so, too, will be yours to bring greater engagement and participation of women in the political process. Some of you may encounter cultural obstacles or obstacles of tradition. Some of you may encounter entrenched political forces that do not wish to accommodate women.

From your interactions over these past days with women leaders from across the region, you know that you are not alone in your pursuit of governance that is responsive to women. You have exchanged ideas, experiences, best practices, and aspirations to build a better future for your country. You now better appreciate that you have allies in your struggle to improve the well-being of women. Certain elements of civil society and the media can be your partners; fellow lawmakers and elements of government may be willing to support you.

You are not alone. The bonds, networks, friendships you have built over these past days will provide continuing opportunities to share experiences and learn from one another. You now belong to a network of women MPs committed to promoting women's political leadership and governance ... I believe this network will prove invaluable as you continue your endeavors to effect change in the political landscape in which you work.

Moreover, the Secretariat launched here today will help sustain this network. The Secretariat is designed to help coordinate your future interactions as you set about to pursue the country action plan that you created to advance your key priorities. The utility of the Secretariat depends upon you. I hope you will use the Secretariat as a resource. I would like to thank BRAC University for agreeing to serve as the home of the South Asia Women's MP Secretariat.

Before we leave today, I would like to take a moment to describe a new global initiative that aims to expand opportunities for women and girls. The initiative will drive inclusive economic growth by breaking down barriers to women's political participation and economic empowerment – it is called the Equal Futures Partnership. The Equal Futures Partnership will officially launch at the UN General Assembly in September and will be comprised of a small group of founding members.

Today, I am pleased to welcome Bangladesh as a founding member of the Equal Futures Partnership. I commend Bangladesh for its leadership to ensure that all girls and boys have bright and equal futures.

The Equal Futures Partnership is an open and inclusive network that welcomes participation from all countries committed to advancing gender equality. As we have seen from this conference, the desire to collaborate for a better future is universal.

I would also like to thank you for taking time out from your busy schedule to participate in this conference. I hope you have enjoyed it, and I hope you found it rewarding and thought-provoking. America is proud to be part of this effort in partnership with DFID, The Asia Foundation and SUNY's Center for International Development.

I would like to thank the Government of Bangladesh for its support of this conference.

As I close, I am convinced the networks and friendships forged in this conference will provide you the tools and resources necessary to promote a stronger role for women in national governance. I believe that prospects for women and children throughout the region are brighter

today than before thanks to your determination to build a better tomorrow. I wish you all the best as you pursue your critical work in building more just societies.

Thank you.

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GR/ 2012